

News from Rep. Stephanie Herseth

For Immediate Release

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HERSETH OPPOSES INCREASED CUTS TO AGRICULTURE PROGRAMS

House Ag Committee Considers Increasing Cuts from \$3 Billion to \$4.25 Billion

October 27, 2005, Washington, D.C. – Rep. Stephanie Herseth today outlined her opposition to increasing cuts to agriculture programs through the budget reconciliation process. The House Agriculture committee has indicated its intention to increase cuts from \$3 billion to a proposed \$4.25 billion. The Committee has not provided details about specific programs to receive cuts, however it is likely that conservation programs, food stamps, and farm programs will be targeted. The Committee postponed a schedule hearing “mark-up” on the bill today in an effort to gather support for these additional cuts, and the hearing is now scheduled for 9:30am Friday morning.

Agriculture spending makes up a small percentage of the total federal budget, less than one percent, yet these new cuts call for agriculture spending to account for approximately 9% of federal mandatory spending reductions. However, the Farm Bill has already saved billions of dollars. When the 2002 farm bill was enacted, the estimated total six-year cost of the programs was \$113 billion (FY2003-FY2008). Based on current market conditions, the cost for these programs was re-estimated to be \$105 billion – a savings of an estimated \$8 billion.

Herseth said, “It is not right to continue to ask for more from our nation’s family farmers and ranchers, particularly when the Farm Bill has already cost billions less than it was predicted to when it was passed in 2002. I voted against the budget last April, largely because it called for \$3 billion in cuts from Agriculture Department programs. Now, they have increased that number to \$4.25 billion, a 42-percent increase.”

Herseth noted the importance of conservation programs like CRP and CSP to South Dakota’s hunting and tourism industries, as well as to the health of our topsoil across the state. Food stamps are also targeted for cuts. Herseth added that working families in rural America depend

on food stamps even more than urban America. Farm programs, which are an essential safety net, are perhaps the least likely to take a hit, but they are still on the table.

Herseth said, “These are challenging times in our nation’s history. We are in the middle of a war, and we are recovering from the largest natural disaster in our nation’s history. Budgets are under tough scrutiny – as they should be. However, family farmers and ranchers shouldn’t have to continue paying such a large debt because of Congress’ broken budget process. These are cost-effective, practical programs that benefit our nation’s heartland, and they are being used as a scapegoat for misplaced budget priorities.”

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Congresswoman Stephanie Herseth serves South Dakota in the U.S. House of Representatives. She is a member of the Blue Dog Coalition, a group of moderate Democrats committed to fiscal discipline and strong national security, and is co-chair of the Rural Working Group, which is dedicated to raising the profile of issues important to rural America. She also serves on three committees vital to South Dakota’s interests: Agriculture, Veterans’ Affairs and Resources.